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ABSTRACT

In attempting to identify causes of the high rates of attrition of beginning teachers and possible solutions to their exodus, this study identified what beginning high school and middle school teachers in the Baltimore County Public School system found were their most urgent concerns and most valuable types of assistance. A questionnaire was sent to 244 beginning teachers during October 1993. One hundred teachers returned completed questionnaires. The same teachers received a second questionnaire at the end of that school year, Spring 1994, that asked what type of assistance they preferred. Results of the first survey indicated that teachers were most concerned with preparation time and evaluation followed by classroom control, managment and discipline, and students with special learning problems. Top-ranking out-of-class concerns were physical and emotional stress, followed by learning how things are done by teachers in the school, finding out about resources, knowing when to use special services, and understanding union issues. Analysis of the second survey and teachers' preferred types of assistance found that opportunities to observe the teaching of their colleagues was regarded as most valuable, followed by having a teacher serve as mentor, and increased resources and workshops focusing on beginning teacher concerns. The paper includes copies of both surveys. (Contains 17 references.) (JB)

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CONCERNS AND PREFERRED ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES OF BEGINING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

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CONCERNS AND PREFERRED ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES OF BEGINNING MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

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INTRODUCTION

No nation can prosper without an educated populace; no school system can provide that education without the talents of skilled teachers. Yet, data from school districts across the Country indicate that teachers are leaving the profession at an alarming rate, particularly those who have recently entered the profession. Some studies indicate that within five years, 40 percent will abandon their new profession for other careers.[1,2,3]

Identifying the causes for the attrition of beginning teachers and possible solutions to their exodus is the focus of this report, the result of a study conducted in 1993 and 1994 in the second largest school district in Maryland, the 25th largest in the Nation.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Over twenty-five years ago, Gallup reported in the 1969 Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools that discipline problems and unmotivated students topped the list of reasons cited by teachers for changing careers.[4] Two decades later, teachers reported that low salary was their chief reason for leaving the profession, but "discipline problems at school" ranked second.[5]

In 1981, Echternact reported the results from a study of 85 Missouri teachers, those completing their first year of teaching

and those who had 20 years of experience in the classroom to discover if there were differences in the problems identified as most troublesome. Both groups agreed that students' indifference to school was their greatest problem, though beginning teachers were more threatened by discipline problems and fear of losing control of the classroom than their more experienced colleagues.[6]

Veenman, in 1984, compiled the results of 84 studies conducted since 1960; 55 completed in the United States; 7, in the West Indies; 6, United Kingdom; 5, the Netherlands; 4, Australia; 2, in Canada and Austria; and 1, in Switzerland and Finland. The top five problems cited were (1) classroom discipline, (2) motivating students, (3) dealing with individual students, (4) assessing students' work, and (5) relations with parents.[7]

Understanding the school's culture was reported by Deal and Chatman in 1989 as another possible factor that may cause new teachers to experience high levels of anxiety. Of the 100 teachers surveyed, 60 percent had received no formal initiation into the school; 75 percent reported that they "learned the ropes by trail and error--sink or swim," a technique they indicated caused anxiety and frustration.[8]

Pigge and Marso's survey of education graduates of Bowling Green University, which covered the years 1982-84, reported highly significant differences (.001) between prior-to-employment expectations of teaching and on-the-job reality.[9]

Ten years later, Peterson and Wesley surveyed 210 education students at Towson State University, part of the Maryland University System, training the largest number of K-12 teachers in the State. The students completed surveys prior to and after their 12-week student teaching internship to identify anticipated problems and those actually experienced during the student-teaching practicum. Their findings confirmed those of earlier researchers--only 1 in 3 of the 201 respondents felt there were adequately prepared to handle discipline problems, an area in which 90 percent had indicated some level of concern.[10] Anxiety over class control was also reported by a similar group of 178 K-12 student teachers at the same University, surveyed by Kiley and Coulby in 1991.[11]

Thomas's study of all beginning middle and secondary teachers (68) in a growing school district of Maryland, 50 miles north of Washington, DC, and 30 miles northwest of Baltimore, MD, used Boccia's instrument to identify Classroom Concerns and Out-of-Class Concerns of the sample. With the encouragement of the school district to complete the anonymous survey for the researcher, two mailings were made to the sample. Of the 68 teachers who returned the survey, 25 were beginning their first year of teaching while 28 had some previous teaching experience in other states but were beginning their first year in the school district. The remaining 15 were just beginning their second year teaching in the county, and it was felt by the school district that their recollections of their first year would be current enough to provide worthwhile

data. Beginning teachers reported highest level of concern about the time needed to prepare for their classes. Classroom control and management, dealing with individual differences among students and working with students receiving special education services were ranked 2, 3, 4, and 5. Physical and emotional stress was ranked as the first "out-of-the-classroom" concern by these teachers.[12]

Gold identified induction programs among the types of assistance most valued by beginning teachers. Such programs should provide information about available support systems to combat feelings of loneliness and isolation and intervention strategies to counter the impact of stress, burnout which they experience in their personal and professional lives.[13]

Mentoring has been suggested as providing a valuable "lifeline" for new teachers. Willis and Auer suggest that mentors can help new teachers clarify their view of the teaching profession and cope with uncertainties by offering personal and professional support to overcome feelings of isolation.[14] The expectations of new teachers that experienced teachers would provide assistance to them when needed was confirmed by the research completed by Hayes. Using the Developmental Research Cycle described by Spradley, Hayes identified the kinds of assistance sought by the neophyte teacher from the experienced faculty member. When new teachers were able to develop a "network of support" from experienced colleagues, they proved more able to handle their professional concerns.[15]

Bercik and Blair-Larsen's study of a school-based, university-assisted induction program in four inner-city parochial schools in Chicago for 20 teachers revealed that first- and second-year teachers indicated the availability of mentors was helpful as well as visits from the principal to their classes.[16] Clyde, at the University of Melbourne (Australia), reported their students valued a high level of support from the schools in which they would be working in the form of induction programs and appointment of a mentor.[17]

METHODOLOGY

The current study identified "classroom concerns" and "out-of-class concerns" of beginning teachers and the types of assistance they perceived as most valuable. For the first phase of this research, items on classroom concerns and out-of-the-classroom concerns were selected from the survey for beginning teachers devised by Boccia. The four-point scale, (4--High level of concern; 3, Moderate level; 2, Low level; 1, Not a problem) employed in the original survey was used. Validity and reliability had been established for the entire instrument by Boccia. For the current study, the researcher added a section on "Comments" to Thomas's revised survey to provide respondents opportunity to include information they felt to be pertinent to the study. Information on age, grade level taught and teaching area were also requested.

With the cooperation and support of the Director of Research of the Maryland school district in which the research was conducted, the names of 244 beginning teachers were secured from the Director of Personnel in the summer of 1993. Middle and high school principals permitted the researcher to use the school system's inner-school mailing system to distribute the surveys. Mid-October, 1993, was chosen for the mailing in order to allow sufficient time for the new teachers to experience the realities of teaching and to identify their chief concerns.

Respondents were requested to return the surveys to the researcher through the same inner-office mail system. One hundred usable surveys were returned.

The second phase of this research occurred in the spring of 1994, when the same 244 teachers received a second questionnaire identifying the types of assistance preferred. The 20-item survey was based on Boccia's instrument, with the addition of demographic items as to school level and gender. Teachers were also asked to indicate the time and place they preferred for attending meetings and were encouraged to list additional kinds of assistance not included in the survey items or to elaborate on any items. Inner-office mails were again used for distribution and return of the surveys in April of 1994.

FINDINGS

Results of First Survey - Classroom Concerns of Beginning Teachers

When the classroom concerns of the 100 respondents were rank-ordered, (Table 1), "time spent in preparation/evaluation" was

Table 1

Rank Order of Classroom Concerns of Beginning Middle and High School Teachers, N=100

Concerns	Scale (1-4)	Rank
Time Spent in preparation/evaluation	2.940	1
Classroom Control, management or discipline	2.910	2
Students with special learning problems	2.740	3
Lesson/unit planing	2.670	4
Adequacy of supplies	2.550	5
Curriculum materials knowledge	2.540	6
Grouping for effective instruction	2.510	7
Dealing with individual student differences	2.390	8
Record keeping administrative matters	2.360	9
Diagnosis of student capability/knowledge	2.240	10
Relevance of subject matter to students	2.210	11.5
Knowledge of adolescent development behavior of learning	2.210	11.5
Designing Tests, projects to evaluate student learning	2.180	13
Knowledge of varied teaching techniques	1.990	14
Grading student work	1.900	15
Skill in conducting discussions	1.890	16
Rapport with students	1.790	17
Content area knowledge	1.720	18

ranked No. 1, followed by "classroom control, management or discipline," 2; "students with special learning problems," 3; "lesson/unit planning," 4; and "adequacy of supplies" as 5. When asked to identify out-of-the-classroom concerns, (Table 2), new teachers ranked physical/emotional stress No. 1, followed by "learning how things are done by teachers in the school," "finding out about community resources," "knowing how and when to use special school services," and "understanding union issues."

When the 100 middle and high school teachers ranked the out-of-classroom concerns, the top-ranking concern reported was "physical/emotional stress." Table 2 shows that "learning how things are done by teachers in the school," "finding out about community resources," "knowing how and when to use special school services," and "understanding union issues," were ranked 2, 3,4, and 5.

The researcher was also interested in analyzing the responses to determine if there were differences in the concerns of beginning teachers, who were recent graduates of teacher-education programs, new teachers who also had business or other work experience, but beginning their first year of teaching, and experienced teachers, new to the school district. Data were also analyzed to determine whether middle and high school teachers differed in their concerns and if teachers of different age groups had different concerns.

The following null hypotheses were tested:

(1) There is no difference in the classroom and out-of-class concerns of beginning teachers just out of college, beginning

Table 2

Rank Order of Outside-the-Classroom Concerns of Beginning Middle and High School Teachers, N=100

Concerns	Scale (1 - 4)	Rank
Physical/emotional stress	2.810	1
Learning how things are done by teachers in the school	2.520	2
Finding out about community resources	2.370	3
Knowing how and when to use special school services	2.300	4
Understanding union issues	2.220	5
Understanding the community in which school is located	2.190	6
Relations with parents	2.150	7
Teacher legal rights	2.120	8
Sense of isolation from other teachers	2.100	9
Extracurricular assignments	1.960	10
Student legal rights	1.950	11
Building administrators	1.870	12
County supervisors	1.720	13

teachers changing to a new profession, and experienced teachers new to the Baltimore County Public School system; (2) There is no difference in the classroom and out-of-classroom concerns of beginning middle and high school teachers; (3) There is no difference in the classroom and out-of-classroom concerns of beginning teachers of different age groups.

(The "beginning teachers changing to a new profession" represented individuals who had received a bachelor's degree some years earlier, with experience in business, the military, Peace Corps, etc.) who had recently completed an intensive one-year graduate program leading to the M.A.T.--Master of Arts in Teaching degree.)

Classroom Concerns. Results of analyses of variance (ANOVA) revealed highly significant differences (.005) regarding "classroom control, management or discipline," between the three groups, though all three groups identified the level of concern as "Moderate." Not unexpectedly, the experienced teachers new to the school district were far less concerned than those entering the profession. The only other concern where significant differences occurred between the three groups was in the area of "content area knowledge" (.05), which all three groups indicated was of "Low" concern.

Out-of-Classroom Concerns. The only out-of-the-classroom concern which resulted in significant differences between the groups was that of "understanding union issues; all groups cited union issues as "Low" level of concern.

When differences between teaching level was analyzed for classroom concerns, one item, "grouping for effective instruction, proved significant at the .05 level. Both groups rated grouping in the category of "low" level of concern category, but middle school were more concerned than high school teachers.

When differences between four age groups (under 25, 25-35, 36-45, over 45) were analyzed, significant differences occurred (.02) for "grading student work" and "designing tests, projects to evaluate student learning," with those in the 36-45 range most concerned. This group was also most concerned regarding "grouping for effective instruction" and "adequacy of supplies" (.04).

Second Survey - Preferred Types of Assistance by Beginning Teachers

Following analyses of the data from the concerns of beginning teachers, the researcher devised a survey to determine the types of assistance perceived as most valuable by beginning teachers. Efforts to establish validity included reviewing the literature for appropriate survey items, review of survey items by university professors experienced in questionnaire construction, and field-testing by school district personnel, including teachers. Boccia's four-point scale (High, Moderate, or Low level of concern and Not at All a concern) used for the first survey was also used for the second questionnaire.

Table 3 reports the rank-ordering of 16 types of assistance from the responses of the 83 middle and high school teachers. Opportunities to observe the teaching of their colleagues was identified as the most valuable assistance; having an experienced

Table 3

Rank Order of Kinds of Assistance Preferred By Beginning Secondary Middle and High School Teachers, N=83

Assistance	Scale (1 - 4)	Rank
Opportunity to observe other classes	3.386	1
Mentor teacher in building	3.313	2
More resources for teaching	3.289	3.5
Workshops specifically for beginning teachers in classroom management/ discipline	3.289	3.5
Workshops specifically for building and on teaching special needs students	3.171	5
Workshops in content areas	3.012	6
Opportunity to share experiences with other beginning teachers	2.940	7.5
Observation and feedback from other teachers	2.940	7.5
Fewer classes	2.783	9
Fewer duties	2.723	10
More observations and feedback from supervisors	2.602	11
More opportunities to conference with specialists like psychologists, speech therapists, etc.	2.585	12
No extra assignments	2.554	13
Graduate courses in teaching strategies	2.506	14
Computer or mail link to university and other beginning teachers	2.133	15
Telephone to university faculty for specific questions	1.928	16

teacher serving as a mentor to the new teachers was ranked as the second most valuable type of assistance, followed by increased resources and workshops focusing on problems unique to the neophyte teachers, which included management and discipline, teaching special needs students and aid in their content fields, as 3, 4, and 5 in value.

The researcher tested the following hypotheses:

(1) There is no difference in the kinds of assistance preferred by middle and high school teachers in the Baltimore County Public Schools; (2) There is no difference in the kinds of assistance preferred by male and female beginning teachers in Baltimore County Public Schools.

Significant differences (.05) resulted on only one type of assistance when middle and high school teachers' responses were analyzed. Middle school teachers identified "fewer duties" as more a more valuable type of assistance than their high school colleagues, though both groups placed this in the "Low" category. No significant differences occurred for any type of assistance when the data were analyzed by gender.

DISCUSSION

Research over the past 25 years highlights the need for beginning teachers to adjust unrealistic expectations of "what fun it will be to teach" to the recognition of their responsibilities. More recent studies identify recurring problems facing new teachers--unmotivated pupils, students who disrupt classes and fight their teachers for control of the classroom. Declining

academic performance by students and rising violence in schools are the norm in far too many schools across the United States. Continuing demands by lawmakers and parents for teachers to meet the needs of every student, including those with special needs due to physical handicaps, learning disabilities or emotional disorders, place greater burdens upon the classroom teacher, even as resources and aides are reduced by shrinking school budgets.

New teachers, facing failure and frustration in their efforts to teach their students successfully, have criticized their undergraduate preparation for failing to provide the necessary instruction in classroom management and discipline, in strategies for working with children with special needs, and techniques for collaborating with parents in a concerted effort to encourage children to learn. They enter a field where expectations of their performance is high but support from school administrators and colleagues, minimal or non-existent.

Until colleges and universities heed the cries of their recent graduates and school systems provide useful induction programs to assist their new teachers in understanding the school's culture, mentors to help them cope with day-to-day problems, and support systems to combat feelings of stress, burnout, isolation and loneliness, classrooms will become battlefields and teachers, casualties, who will leave the field in defeat. Such an appalling result cannot be countenanced. In-service activities to induct beginning teachers into the school district can be provided at

relatively small costs. Changes in teacher-preparation curriculum can also be made to enable those entering the profession to provide the competent teaching they aspire to give. Cooperation and collaboration between universities and school districts can provide the vital link to achieving success for those seeking entrance to the teaching profession.

NOTES

[1] Marvin A. Henry, "Strengths and Needs of First-Year Teachers," Teacher Educator 22 (Autumn 1986): 10.

[2] Yvonne Gold, "Reducing Stress and Burnout Through Induction Programs," Action in Teacher Education XI, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 67.

[3] Betty Heath-Camp and William G. Camp, "What New Teachers Need to Succeed," Vocational Education Journal 65 (May 1990): 22.

[4] George H. Gallup, "Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitude Toward the Public Schools," Phi Delta Kappan (Sept. 1969), 31.

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[6] Lonnie Echternact, "Instructional Problems of Business Teachers As Perceived by First-Year Teachers and Experienced Teachers," College Student Journal 15 no. 4 (Winter, 1981): 352-58.

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[8] Terrence E. Deal and Reva M. Chatman, "Learning the Ropes Alone: Socializing New Teachers," Action in Teacher Education XI (Spring 1989): 23-24.

[9] Fred L. Pigge and Ronald N. Marso, The Influence of Pre-service Training and Teaching Experience Upon Attitudes and Concerns About Teaching (ERIC, ED 283 825, 1987), 3.

[10] Wesley Petersen and Donald Wesley, "Classroom Discipline: How Well Are We Preparing Student Teachers?" Los Angeles: Association of Teacher Educators, 1993.

[11] Margaret Kiley and Helen Coulby, "Anxieties of Pre-Service Teachers." Boston: Eastern Educational Research Association, 1991.

[12] Thomas, Beverly, "A Study of the Concerns of Beginning Secondary Teachers," (M.Ed. research paper, Towson State University, 1992), 25, 33.

[13] Yvonne Gold, "Reducing Stress and Burnout Through Induction Programs," Action in Teacher Education XI, no. 3 (Fall 1989): 66-69.

[14] Charles Willis and Barbara Auer, Beginning Teachers and Professional Development (ERIC, ED 329 543, 1988), 31-33.

[15] Lynda Fender Hayes, Surviving the First Year: Beginning Teachers' Conversations with Their Colleagues. (ERIC, ED 355 346, 1991, 2-5.

[16] Janet T. Bercik and Susan Blair-Larsen, School-Based/University Assisted Induction Model. (ERIC, ED 327 497, 1990), 4-9/

[17] Margaret Clyde, Teacher Development: A Comparative Study of Early Childhood Teachers in Their First-Year of Teaching, 1988-90. (ERIC, ED 341 677, 1991), 5-20.

Beginning Teacher Questionnaire

Are you: Check the one which best identifies you.

___ A beginning teacher certified to teach since 1992.(1)
___ A beginning teacher experienced, but new to Baltimore County.(2)
___ A beginning teacher changing careers.(3)
___ Other: (please explain).(4) _____

School Level:

___ Middle(5)
___ High(6)

Demographic Information

___ Under 25(7)
___ 26-35(8)
___ 36-45(9)
___ 46 and over(10)

Listed below you will find a number of concerns that you may classify as problems for you as a teacher. Please circle the number that corresponds with the degree to which you consider each concern a problem. All responses are anonymous.

Classroom Concerns	High	Moderate	Low	Not a Problem
A. Record keeping, administrative matters(11)	4	3	2	1
B. Lesson/unit planning(12)	4	3	2	1
C. Content area knowledge(13)	4	3	2	1
D. Curriculum materials knowledge(14)	4	3	2	1
E. Relevance of subject matter to students(15)	4	3	2	1
F. Knowledge of adolescent development, behavior of learning(16)	4	3	2	1
G. Classroom control, management, or discipline(17)	4	3	2	1

	High	Moderate	Low	Not a Problem
H. Learning how things are done by teachers in the school(36)	4	3	2	1
I. Sense of isolation from other teachers(37)	4	3	2	1
J. Physical/emotional stress(38)	4	3	2	1
K. Understanding union issues(39)	4	3	2	1
L. Understanding the community in which the school is located(40)	4	3	2	1
M. Finding out about community resources(41)	4	3	2	1

Please list any concerns you have that are not listed above. Comments are welcome.

BEGINNING TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

Kinds of Assistance

Please check the appropriate response for your situation.

School Level:

_____ Middle (1)

_____ High (2)

Demographic Information:

_____ Male (3)

_____ Female (4)

Listed below you will find kinds of assistance which may help you meet success in your first year of teaching. Please circle the number that corresponds with the degree to which you would consider each kind of assistance helpful.

	Kind of Assistance	High	Moderate	Low	Not at All
(5)	Fewer Classes	4	3	2	1
(6)	Mentor teacher in building	4	3	2	1
(7)	No extracurricular assignments	4	3	2	1
(8)	More resources for teaching	4	3	2	1
(9)	Workshops in content area	4	3	2	1
(10)	Opportunity to share experiences with other beginning teachers	4	3	2	1
(11)	Telephone to university faculty for specific questions	4	3	2	1
(12)	More observation and feedback from supervisors	4	3	2	1
(13)	Opportunity to observe other classes	4	3	2	1
(14)	Workshops specifically for beginning teachers in classroom management/discipline	4	3	2	1
(15)	Fewer duties	4	3	2	1
(16)	Computer or mail link to university and other beginning teachers	4	3	2	1
(17)	Graduate courses in teaching strategies	4	3	2	1
(18)	Observation and feedback from other teachers	4	3	2	1

	Kind of Assistance	High	Moderate	Low	Not at All
(19)	Workshops specifically for beginning teachers on teaching special needs students	4	3	2	1
(20)	More opportunities to conference with specialists like psychologists, speech therapists, etc.	4	3	2	1

Time/Place

(21)	Meetings to occur	Weekly	Bi-weekly	Monthly	Bi-monthly
(22)	Meetings to occur at	Local school	Area location	County-wide location	

COMMENTS:

Please feel free to list additional kinds of assistance you think would be helpful to a first year teacher. Also, please elaborate on any of the listed items.

Thank You!!